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COSTUME AND WEAVING IN SARAGURO, ECUADOR

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Costume is defined as the style of dress prevailing in a community including hats, hairstyle, jewelry and footwear, as well as other garments. Traditionally in the Andes, clothing has served not only to protect the body against the elements, but has also functioned as an indicator of age, sex, marital status, wealth, social position and ethnic group (or tribal) affiliation.

About half the population of Ecuador is Indian. However, Indian (*indígena*) is not a racial definition. Rather, an Indian is a person who speaks, lives and dresses like other members of the Indian community. An *indígena* in Ecuador (the case is different for Peru and Bolivia) is defined by language, lifestyle and dress, and of these dress is the most important. An Indian in the Ecuadorian Andes can speak Spanish rather than Quichua, and can live in town rather than the country, but as long as he wears Indian costume he is considered Indian. An *indígena* makes the final step toward becoming white (*blanco*) by abandoning Indian costume, and in fact this happens, although less frequently than one would imagine, given the general prejudice against the indigenous population.

Ecuadorians themselves do not use the term *mestizo*. The fundamental distinctions are between Indians and whites, and as mentioned previously, these distinctions are not racial. White Ecuadorian dress is similar to that of the United States or Europe, with the exception that the poncho is worn by some men and women, while Andean Indian costume is a combination of pre-Hispanic and Spanish colonial dress. White costume is commercially manufactured, while Indian costume is generally homemade, often with tools and techniques whose antecedents are lost in time.

Saraguro is one of three communities in southern Ecuador where I am researching the costume and weaving. The town of Saraguro is situated at 8,200 feet in the eastern cordillera of the Ecuadorian Andes. It has a population of 1,600, mainly *blanco*. The indigenous population lives in small settlements in the mountains within a twenty mile radius of the town, and comes into Saraguro for shopping and for the Sunday market. The present Quichua-speaking indigenous population of the area is estimated at ten to twenty-five thousand people.

Saraguro is relatively isolated. The road in and out is not paved, and Cuenca, 100 miles north, is a 5½ hour bus ride in good weather with no landslides, while Loja, the capital of the province of the same name, is 42 miles and 2½ hours by bus south. Fewer than twenty foreign visitors a year pass through Saraguro and most of them stay in the town proper. The town has electricity and paved roads, but these have not been extended to any of the Indian communities. The communities close to town are bilingual in Quichua and Spanish while more remote communities are monolingual in Quichua. All these Indians call themselves Saragureños or *indígenas de Saraguro*.

In A.D. 1455 the Inca Tupac Yupanqui marched out of Peru and began his conquest of southern Ecuador. At that time the area was occupied by a group called the Palta. After the Palta were defeated by the Inca armies, thousands of them were forcibly removed from their land and resettled in Bolivia. In the midst of the remaining Palta the Inca settled a group of Peruvians to teach the Palta Quichua, the worship of the sun and to watch for signs of rebellion. Transferred populations were called *mitmakuna*, and the ancestors of today's Saragureños were *mitmakuna*, who were sent to Saraguro as Inca administrators and colonists. According to linguist Lawrence Carpenter the Saragureños speak a dialect of Quichua which was brought by the Incas; one of the oldest forms of this Inca-introduced Quichua spoken in Ecuador. Their language is consistent with an origin in southern Peru.

The Saragureños are primarily farmers and cattle traders. Almost every family has its own fields where corn, beans and potatoes are grown. Sheep and cattle are pastured at higher elevations and a few sheep are kept in the yard. Since before the turn of the century the Saragureños have driven their cattle over the continental divide and down into the jungle (*Oriente*) to the east. The cattle are fattened and driven back over the Andes, supplying much of the beef for southern Ecuador. The cattle trade is lucrative and the Saragureños are relatively well off economically. They are also among the best educated Indian groups in Ecuador with many young people in *colegio* (high school) and some in the universities in Loja, Cuenca and Quito. Anywhere in Ecuador the Saragureños are recog-

nizable by their costume, and they wear it even in the jungle where wool clothing is miserably hot.

What is interesting about Saraguro dress is its antiquity. Long before the Incas, various Indian groups had distinct headdresses and hairstyles. The Incas insisted that the people they conquered retain these distinctions. Shortly after the Spanish conquest and again following the great Indian rebellions of the 1780's, the Spanish issued edicts prohibiting the wearing of Inca-style clothing and headgear. The Indians were forced to wear brimmed hats, but the various groups, with typical conservatism, insisted on retaining distinctive hairstyles and hats. Today throughout the Andes of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia one can identify an Indian's origin by his hat.

The Saraguro hat, worn by both men and women, is the white, broadbrimmed *sombrero de lana*. These hats are handmade in Saraguro by a process of felting wool, then molding and ironing it. The black marks on the brim come from the ironing and are considered part of the design. This hat is being replaced in daily use by dark felt fedoras or white hats of *paja toquilla* ("Panama" hats), but every family owns *sombreros de lana* which are worn on formal occasions.

Saragureños, male and female, never cut their hair. The men (the women are discussed later) wear their hair pulled back in a long braid (*jimba*). This is a distinctive feature of *indígena* costume in Ecuador, and two other groups, the Cañari and Otavaleño also wear the *jimba*. It is such an important part of *indígena* dress that young men who enter the Ecuadorian army are not required to cut their braid.

Since the Saragureños were *mitmakuna*, we can assume that their original dress was some version of Inca costume. An important feature of pre-Hispanic dress was that garments were square or rectangular in shape, either woven exactly to size on the loom, or made of rectangular pieces of cloth sewn together. (A few pieces, mainly breechcloths, were shaped on the loom.) Cloth was never cut, nor did garments have pockets, tucks or darts. The yarn for these textiles, either cotton or camelid, was spun on spindles and woven on looms identical to those in use in the Andes today.

These looms, popularly called backstrap, consist simply of sticks, or poles, and string. They can produce a four-selvedge textile, a piece completely woven from end to end (Figs. 1, 2). This is because the strings and poles manipulating the warp can be easily removed, so when a piece is woven, the loom is literally taken off the textile instead of vice versa. There is no need to cut the warp. If fringe is desired, space can be left for

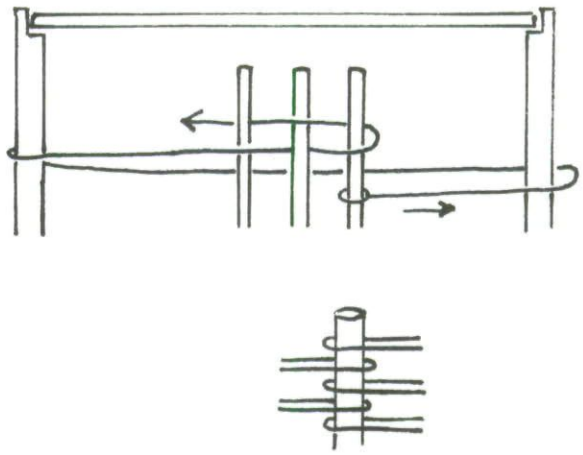

Fig. 1 A. Saraguro warping stakes. The warping starts at the second stake from the right (*pitidor*) and proceeds to the right in a circle, passing around the *pitidor* and returning to the left. The result is a circular, continuous warp.

B. A close-up of the *pitidor*. When the warp is put on the loom the *pitidor* is replaced by a string or thinner stick. When the weaving is completed the string or stick is removed and the fabric opens up from a circular to a flat, rectangular piece.

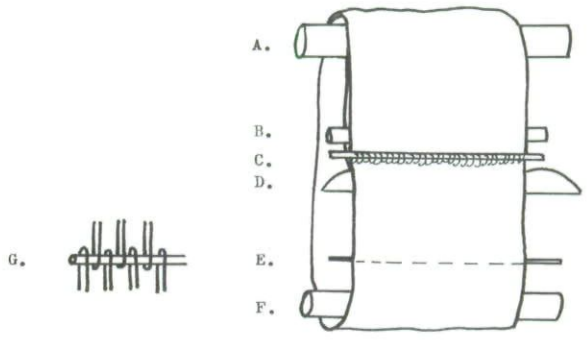

Fig. 2 Schematic diagram of a Saraguro loom (*awana*, *macana* or *kallua*).

A. Back beam or *altej kaspi*.
B. Shed stick or *tupa*.
C. Heddle stick or *illawa marka* with string heddles or *illawa puchka*.
D. Beater or *kallua*.
E. Joining stick or *pitidor*.
F. Front beam or *jillik*.
G. Close-up of the *pitidor*.

this, but the ends are loops. Textiles woven on the Spanish-introduced treadle loom, on the other hand, must be cut to be taken off the loom, and can never be four-selvedge.

As a general rule in contemporary costume, if a piece is woven on the backstrap loom (*awana*, *macana* or *kallua*), is four-selvedge or has looped fringe, and has a Quichua name, chances are its antecedents are pre-Hispanic. If a garment is tailored from fabric woven on the treadle loom (*telar*) and has a Spanish name, chances are it is Spanish in origin.

In Saraguro, the men's shirt, or *kushma*, woven in plain weave (*pacha*) on the backstrap loom, is similar in style to the Inca tunic. A *kushma* is

Fig. 3 Daniel Charlan of Las Lagunas in complete traditional costume including *kushma*, *alforja* and *zamarro*. He is wearing the old-style felt hat, and has his poncho thrown up over his shoulder to reveal his *kushma* and belt.

woven in two sections which are sewn together with slits left for the neck and arms. It can also be woven in one piece with the neck slit woven in. This piece is folded in half and the sides sewn up, with slits left for arm holes. The join is done in an embroidery stitch with colored yarn, which indicates community affiliation. For example, Oñacapa and Tambupamba use three different colors in the join, while the communities of Las Lagunas, Ilincho, Gunudel and Guluxpamba use one color, either red, green or blue. This is also true for poncho joins. The dimensions of a typical *kushma* in finished form are 79 × 78 cm.

The *kushma*, like most of Saraguro dress, is dark blue or black. It used to be belted with a complementary-warp belt called a *mama chumbi* (mother belt) woven on the backstrap loom (*awana*), but now most men use a leather belt (*cinturón*). Around the house a man may wear a sweater or commercial shirt under or instead of his *kushma* but the *kushma* is worn on formal occasions such as the Sunday visit to the market, weddings, funerals and fiestas (Fig. 3).

The poncho is basically a wide *kushma*, and is an integral part of Saraguro men's dress. The poncho is always woven in two sections which are joined with a slit left for the neck. It is not a pre-conquest garment, however, and the first references come from Chile in 1629. It was probably developed by the Araucanian Indians for use on horseback. The poncho spread throughout the Andes in the 17th century, and is almost always made on the backstrap loom.

Two other distinctive features of Saraguro costume date from the colonial era. The Spanish insisted the Indians abandon the breechcloth and wear pants instead. The pants of that time were knee breeches, which is what Saragureño men wear today. As might be expected, they have a Spanish name (*pantalones cortos*) and are tailored from *bayeta*, a balanced twill-weave wool fabric woven on the treadle loom (see Fig. 4).

On special occasions the men wear a garment resembling cloth riding chaps, called *zamarro*, which is Spanish for riding breeches. The Saragureños do not associate *zamarro* with riding at all, but rather with status and prestige. This is probably because Indians were forbidden to ride horseback in the Colonial era, and thus associated riding breeches with status. *Zamarro* are woven in one piece on the backstrap loom and then cut in half. This, along with the name indicates a post-conquest origin. *Zamarro* are worn over the *pantalones cortos* and are considered almost essential for formal occasions (Fig. 3).

Fig. 4 Balta Ambuludí of Gunudel with his son Lucho, in traditional dress.

Fig. 5 Carmen and Hortensia Charlan of Las Lagunas in complete traditional women's dress.

Footwear is called by its Quichua name, *ushuta*. This includes shoes and rubber boots. Formerly the Saragureños wore leather sandals and a few old men still wear them.

Finally, both men and women use cloth saddlebags (*alforjas*) to carry things (Fig. 3). *Alforjas* are definitely European, but they are woven in one piece on the backstrap loom.

Saraguro women's dress, like the men's, is a mixture of the ancient and the old. Like the men, women never cut their hair, but wear it pulled back and tied, or in one long braid. Their hats are the same as the men's.

Certain garments are obviously pre-Hispanic in origin. The rectangular shoulder wrap (*lliglla*) and belts (*chumbis*) both have Quichua names

Fig. 6 Hortensia Charlan pleating an *anaku*.

and are woven on the backstrap loom. They also conform to descriptions of Inca women's costume. The gathered skirt (*pollera*), on the other hand, is made from *bayeta* woven on the treadle loom, and derives from Spanish peasant costume. The *pollera* has its own waistband (*watu*), but a belt, which is a narrower version of the men's *mama chumbi*, is worn over it (Fig. 10).

Next comes the *anaku*. The name is Quichua and it is woven on the backstrap loom, fitting a pre-conquest pattern. It is gathered into hundreds of tiny pleats and worn over the *pollera* (Fig. 5). This pleating is definitely a Spanish introduction. Eventually the pleats come out, so the *anaku* is washed, then laid on boards and re-pleated with stones and sticks (Fig. 6). Another belt is wrapped around the waist over all the layers. This belt has supplementary-warp pick-up designs such as birds, animals, stars and plants and is called a *de la china* (of the female) (Fig. 7). It, too, is woven on the backstrap loom.

The most recent addition to the women's dress is an embroidered blouse (*camisa bordada*) made from commercial cotton or rayon fabric. It is sewn on a treadle sewing machine and hand embroidered around the neck and cuffs. The grandparents, though, remember the garment which preceded the blouse. It was called a *tupullina* (to bring the *tupu* onto the body) and resembles descriptions of Inca women's dress, only shorter. The *tupullina* consisted of one or two pieces of fabric woven on the backstrap loom. It was wrapped around the torso and pinned over the shoulders with *tupus* (shawl pins).

One family wove a *tupullina* for me, complete with two handcarved bone *tupus*, attached to the garment with yarn. Considerable disagreement arose over how the *tupullina* was worn, and the answer must await a visit to several of the old women who wore the *tupullina* as children.

Today, a woman will wear a blouse or sweater around the yard, but as soon as she goes anywhere she puts on her *lliglla* and fastens it closed with her *tupu* (Figs. 5, 8). The *tupu*, or shawl pin, predates the Incas. Under Inca rule the nobility wore *tupus* of gold and silver while the common people wore *tupus* of wood or bone.

Contemporary *tupus* are mold-made by several jewelers in Saraguro, using two kinds of metal. One source is Peruvian silver *soles* (not minted since the turn of the century), which are 900 parts silver, almost sterling. A silver *tupu* and

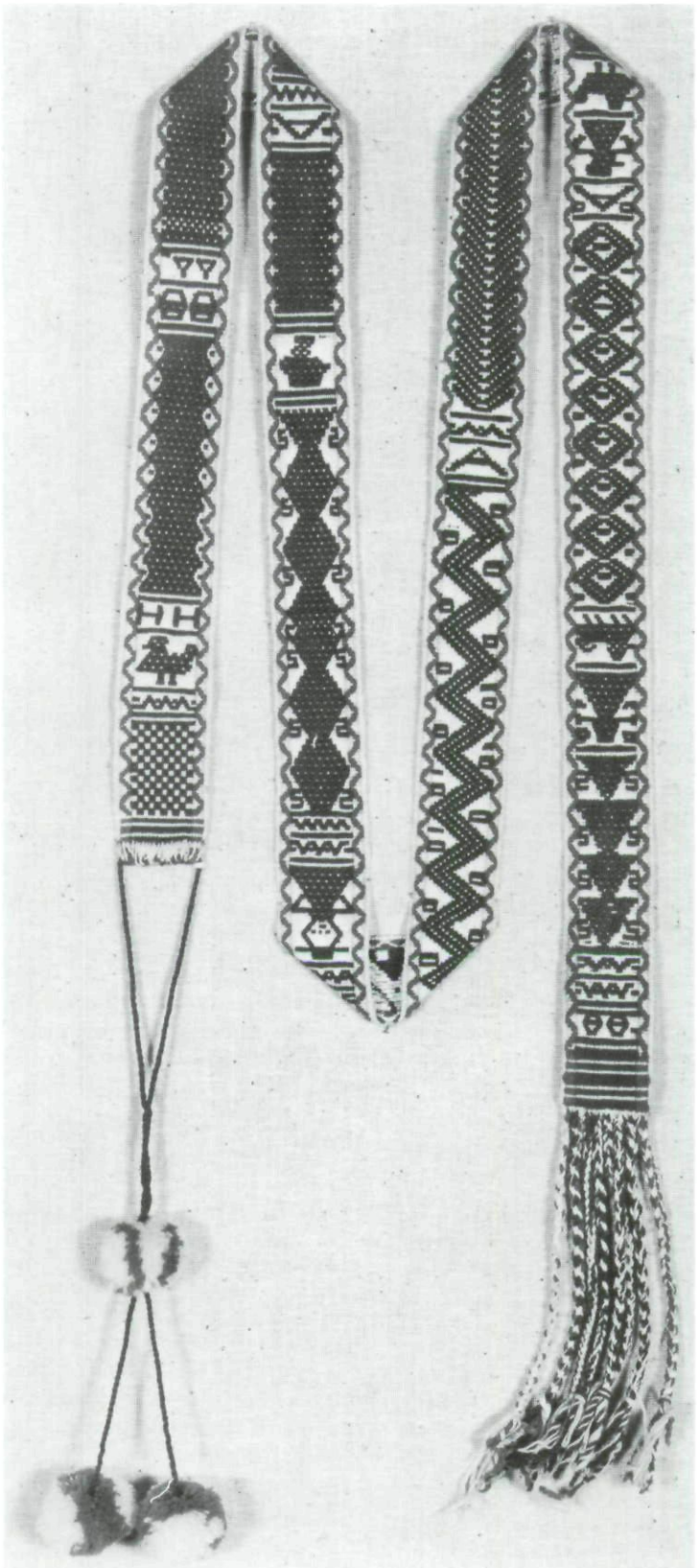

Fig. 7 *"De la China"* belt, woven by María Asunción Quizhpe of Gunudel in 1978 (*cf.* Fig. 12). The tassels are worn hanging down the back. White cotton ground, blue acrylic supplementary warps. T.M. 1979.2.1. Gift of Lynn Meisch.

Fig. 8 The women of the Guamán family. The baby boy's head is wrapped in a *pañuelo*.

chain (*cadena*) costs up to $120. The second kind of *tupu* is made from nickel from Ecuadorian *sucres* minted in 1937 and 1946. Some are plain nickel; others are bathed in silver. These *tupus* are considerably cheaper and are more commonly worn.

About a century ago the Saragureños used bone *tupus*. Presumably at one time they had gold and silver jewelry. It is highly possible that Saraguro was one of the first communities to send all of its gold to Cajamarca for the Inca Atahualpa's ransom after he was captured by Pizarro in 1532. Not only is Saraguro just 240 miles north of Cajamarca, but the community was loyal to Atahualpa during the Inca civil war.

Earrings (*sarsillus*) are considered an essential part of women's costume and girls have their ears pierced soon after birth. *Sarsillus* are of Spanish origin and two kinds are in use, both silver filigree. One style, with half moons, is called *media lunas*. The other is called *kurimolde*, a mixture of Quichua and Spanish meaning gold mold. No one can ever recall a pair of *kurimoldes* actually made of gold, however. Fine earrings and *tupus* are passed along from mother to daughter as family heirlooms.

Finally, women wear two styles of bead necklaces (*walkas*). The colors and number of rows indicate the woman's community. If women wear shoes they are usually plastic ones sold in the market, although recently tennis shoes have made an appearance.

Children are miniature versions of the adults and are dressed in costume as soon as they are toilet trained (Figs. 4, 9). Little ones have their heads covered with a kerchief (*pañuelo*) and American cowboy bandanas are very popular (Fig. 8). Because children are already wearing what amounts to a uniform they are allowed to wear traditional dress to school, while white children must buy a school uniform.

Saraguro costume, except for shirts, blouses and the women's belts, is invariably made from sheep's wool, dyed dark blue or black. When asked why, Saragureños say that black protects against the evil rays of the rainbow which cause women to give birth to monsters. (The concept of rainbows as maleficent is Inca.)

The costume has been dark colored for quite a while. There are only four colors in Quichua: black (*yana*), red (*puka*), yellow (*killu*) and white (*yurak*). Where we distinguish two colors, dark blue and black, the Saragureños distinguish one, *yana*. Formerly *yana* was obtained through the use of at least five different local plant dyes, and imported indigo, which is highly val-

ued. The importation of indigo (*tinacu azul*) has almost stopped, so now most dyeing is done with Peruvian anilines, especially the color *azul marino* (sea blue).

There has been a shift in the color of the costume over the past 200 years. Clothing used to be made from dark, undyed sheep's wool and there are at least five Quichua words used to describe the various brown, black and gray shades of wool. In accordance with the four Quichua colors brown is classified with red. Natural brown wool yarn is called *pukaiło*, a contraction of the Quichua *puka* and the Spanish *hilo* meaning red yarn. Undyed wool, especially browns, came to be considered rustic within the past 80 years and families now strive for a dark blue or black.

Immediately obvious to any visitor is the fact that almost all the women and girls are spinning, using the pre-Conquest distaff and hand spindle. The distaff (*wanguna kaspi*) is a yard-long stick while the spindle (*puchikana sigsi*) is made from Chonta palm brought up from the jungle. The whorl (*piruru*) is anything from an orange peel or piece of corn stalk to a finely carved local stone. *Puchukana sigsi* means *sigsi* for making thread and until 80 years ago, when

Fig. 9 Yolia Charlan carrying her doll on her back, the way adult women carry their babies.

Fig. 10 María Asunción and María Alegría Quizhpe of Gunudel spinning. Asunción is spinning *ali ladu*, while Alegría is spinning *lluki man*.

Fig. 11 Bolivio Guamán of Las Lagunas weaving a women's "*de la china*" belt.

the cattle trips to the *Oriente* began, the Saragureños used the stem of the *sigsi*, or pampas grass, for their spindles.

Unlike most of Peru and Bolivia, in Ecuador the spindle is not dropped, but is supported in the right hand while the left draws out the fibers. There are two ways to spin. The first is off the bottom, or whorl, end of the spindle. This is called *alli puchikana* or *alli ladu*, right or well spun. The second is off the top of the spindle and is called *lluki man* or going left. Fig. 10 shows both methods. *Alli* spinning produces a very fine yarn with an S twist, while *lluki* spinning produces a coarser yarn with a Z twist. In Peru and Bolivia *lluki* spinning is associated with magical practices. This is not the case in Saraguro, but a local folk song says that when a woman spins *alli* it is for her husband and when she spins *lluki* it is for her lover.

Every *indígena* girl learns to spin, beginning at about age four when she is given a toy distaff and spindle. Almost all Saragureño males can spin and little boys play with their sisters' spindles, but spinning is considered exclusively women's work and adult males are never seen with the distaff and spindle.

Since almost all the family's clothes are handspun and handwoven, women and girls are busy spinning when they aren't occupied with other chores. Saragureño women can hike up a steep mountain path with a baby and a load of firewood on their backs, spinning as they go. A woman simply isn't considered marriagable unless she can spin well. The *alli* spinning is extremely fine and is used for ponchos, *kushmas*, belts, *anakus*, *lligllas* and *zamarros*. I have examples of *alli* spinning by 16-year-old Mariana Losano that are finer than commercial cotton sewing thread. The coarser *lluki* spinning is used for blankets, *alforjas*, *bayeta* and food storage sacks (*costales*).

Every indigenous household in Saraguro owns at least one backstrap loom (*awana*). The *awana* is usually set up in front of the house under the eaves (Figs. 11, 12). In many homes, two large poles are sunk into the earth against the wall to support the back bar of the loom. Only a few households own treadle looms and these families often accept orders from their

Fig. 12 María Asunción Quizhpe weaving a "*de la china*" belt.

neighbors for *bayeta*. In that case, the orderers supply the handspun yarn which the loom owners weave into *bayeta* for a fee.

Weaving is considered basically men's work, but many women can and do weave on the *awana*. This is especially true in households where the father is dead, or has deserted the family, or is off on a long cattle trip to the Oriente. Even in families where the men are present it is not unusual to see women weaving small items such as belts and waistbands for *pollera* skirts and *anakus*. As a general rule, however, only men weave large textiles on the *awana*, and use the treadle loom.

A unique feature of Saraguro weaving is that textiles are dyed after they come off the loom. The yarn is not dyed before being warped and woven. The dyeing, like the spinning, is considered primarily women's work. Thus the women clean and spin the yarn, the men weave the textile, and the women dye it, with the entire family participating somewhere along the line. Just as girls learn to spin, boys learn to weave in preparation for assuming an adult role in the community. In Saraguro, neither the costume, nor its traditional method of manufacture, is in danger of disappearing in the foreseeable future.

PARTIAL LISTING OF NATURAL DYES USED IN SARAGURO

A number of dye plants currently in use have not been botanically identified. The following is a list of those for which we have botanical identification. Except for black walnut, the dyes are used to dye the handspun wool yarn used in weaving the *de la china* belts, *watus* and *ñajcha* belts. Walnut is also used to dye *bayeta* and the poncho from the community of Cañaro. This poncho is then overdyed with *sangre de toro* (bull's blood) aniline, resulting in a wine-colored garment.

Spanish or Quichua Name	*Color Obtained*	*Scientific Name*	*English Name*
Ayarosa (flowers)	Yellow	Calendula officinalis	Marigold
Espuelas (trunk)	Yellow	Barberis rigidifolia	Barberry
Retama (flowers)	Yellow	Spartium junceum	Scotch broom
Sangurachi	Yellow-green	Amaranthus caudatus	Amaranth
Achiote (seeds)	Orange	Bixa orellana	Achiote
Laurel (bark and seeds)	Blue	Laurus noblis	Laurel
Aliso (bark)	Black	Alnus acuminata	Alder
Nogal, Tokte (nut shells)	Brown	Juglans nigra	Black walnut

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